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FURTHER CORRESPONDENCE

RESPECTING

THE LEBANON

PART 4

January to December 1950

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FURTHER CORRESPONDENCE RESPECTING
LEBANON—PART 4

GENERAL CORRESPONDENCE

EL 1212/1

No. 1

H.M.S. LIVERPOOL'S VISIT TO BEIRUT

Sir W. Houstoun-Boswall to Mr. McNeil. (Received 21st January)

(No. 14)

Beirut.

Sir, 17th January, 1950.

I have the honour to report that His Majesty's Ship *Liverpool* (Captain U. D. Shaw-Hamilton, Royal Navy) flying the flag of Vice-Admiral the Earl Mountbatten of Burma, K.G., P.C., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., G.C.V.O., K.C.B., D.S.O., Commanding the First Cruiser Squadron, paid an informal visit to Beirut from 11th January to 16th January.

2. H.M.S. *Liverpool* arrived in Beirut harbour on 11th January and fired a national salute of twenty-one guns which was replied to from the shore. A further salute of twenty-one guns was fired in honour of the President of the Lebanese Republic.

3. After I had returned Lord Mountbatten's visit to me, I accompanied him on visits to the Prime Minister, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister of National Defence and the Commander-in-Chief. The admiral also signed the President's Book. After that the admiral and two or three officers lunched with us privately and in the evening my wife and I gave a cocktail party to provide an opportunity for some important Lebanese and members of the British community to meet the admiral and officers of H.M.S. *Liverpool*.

4. On 12th January the President of the Republic and Madame Beshara el Khoury gave a luncheon party in the admiral's honour. Among the guests were the Prime Minister, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Madame Takla, the Minister of National Defence, the Lebanese Commander-in-Chief, the captain of H.M.S. *Liverpool*, my wife and myself. That afternoon a large cocktail party was given on board H.M.S. *Liverpool*, to which were invited the Prime Minister and other members of the Government, senior Lebanese officers and officials, some of the diplomatic corps and of the British community. It had been hoped that the party would be held on deck, but owing

to the inclement weather visitors were entertained between decks where admirable extempore arrangements had been made at very short notice. At the close of the party, the weather having cleared, there was a ceremonial sunset parade by the Royal Marine band and two pipers of the Cameron Highlanders on the quay-side, which by its dignity and precision impressed all those who were privileged to witness it from the deck of H.M.S. *Liverpool*. That evening Lord Mountbatten and one or two officers dined informally at the legation and accompanied us to a ball on the pre-war scale given by the Honorary Consul-General for the Irish Republic and Mrs. Surssock Cochran, an heiress of Lebanese origin.

5. The following day the admiral gave a lunch party on board H.M.S. *Liverpool* in honour of the President, the principal guests being as at the President's luncheon on 12th January except that, because Madame el Khoury was unable to negotiate the gangway owing to the state of her heart, no ladies were invited: the American and French Military Attachés were also present much to their gratification. During lunch music was played by the ship's Royal Marine band and the pipers, whose performance was so highly appreciated that the Lebanese Commander-in-Chief said that he would like to have pipers to stimulate his own army. The many souvenirs in the admiral's cabin such as the sword of the Japanese Supreme Commander of the Southern Region were of great interest to His Excellency and the other guests. In the evening, the Commander-in-Chief gave a cocktail party at the Cercle des Officiers which was attended by roughly equal numbers of British and Lebanese officers, as well as the service attachés and members of the staff of His Majesty's Legation. Later that evening my wife and I gave a dinner party for the admiral and some of his staff at which among others the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Madame

Takla were present. A number of other guests joined us after dinner for informal dancing.

6. On Saturday the admiral made a trip privately to Damascus where he stayed with His Majesty's Minister. He returned on Sunday and that evening kindly invited some of us to dinner in the flagship.

7. Arrangements were made for the entertainment of the officers and men of the ship; one party went duck shooting over the Syrian border, whilst another party of officers were enabled to enjoy some skiing at the Cedars as the guests of the Lebanese army: other members of the ship's company were also able to ski nearer to Beirut. There was football, too, but outdoor sports in Beirut were much marred by rain. The St. George's (Anglo-American) Club was, as is the custom, thrown open to officers of the ship for whom a dance was given on Saturday, 14th January, whilst a party of ratings were invited to dancing and supper on another day. A further party of about seventy ratings went to Damascus, but unfortunately were delayed en route owing to snow and so only had a very short time in the city. I am also informed that as usual with them on the occasion of visits to Beirut by His Majesty's ships, the members of the British colony did what they could to make their stay enjoyable and invited a fair number of the ship's company to their homes.

8. H.M.S. *Liverpool* sailed for Alexandria early on the morning of 16th January.

9. The visit of H.M.S. *Liverpool* has been without equal in the three years I have been here. For although some seventy of His Majesty's ships have visited this port during the last two years, and Beirut might well have been expected to be a little *blasé*, none can have created such a profound impression on the Lebanese people and the British community alike, deeply stirred, though they were, by the visible might of H.M.S. *Vanguard* and the distinguished presence on board of the Commander-in-Chief. But the exploits of Admiral Mountbatten during the war, the outstanding part he has played in the history of our times as well, of course, as the fact that he is a member of the Royal Family, made of this visit an occasion of especial and signal significance. Visits such as these, which are regarded as a real compliment by the hosts, cement the natural friendly gratitude of this country to our own apparent in all classes in the Lebanon and achieve far more than any amount of propaganda. Indeed, it has been said in some Lebanese quarters that this visit was worth twelve months' work by the Information Section!

I am sending copies of this despatch to His Majesty's Minister at Damascus and to the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean.

I have, &c.

W. E. HOUSTOUN-BOSWALL.

EL 1011/1

No. 2

LEBANON: ANNUAL REVIEW FOR 1949

Sir W. Houstoun-Boswall to Mr. McNeil. (Received 7th February)

(No. 21. Confidential) *Beirut,*
Sir, *31st January, 1950.*

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith a review of events in the Lebanon during the year 1949 for which I am indebted to Mr. B. C. MacDermot, who has skilfully drawn in broad lines an accurate if rather depressing picture of this most beautiful but ill-administered little country.

I have, &c.

W. E. HOUSTOUN-BOSWALL.

Enclosure in No. 2

Annual Review of the Lebanon for the Year 1949

The year 1949 was the most critical year that the new Lebanon has yet faced, since

it saw the Christian-Moslem Compromise of 1943 openly endangered by external pressure and internal strain. On the one hand the consolidation of a strong military Power on the southern frontier in the early months was followed in the summer by the first of a series of startling changes in Syria (followed in its turn almost immediately by an abortive revolt within the Lebanon) and in the autumn by the spectre of union between Syria and Iraq. On the other hand the confidence of the Lebanese in their ability to surmount such dangers and difficulties was undermined by the dismal record of the Government in the home field, by the failure of the opposition parties to offer any alternative and by the tailing off of the post-war boom. The danger of union between Syria and Iraq

split the country from top to bottom and it became clear that in the event of such a union Tripoli (and perhaps other Moslem districts of the Lebanon) might wish to secede to it. The Government's neglect both of Moslem and Maronite interests in the north weakened support for the compromise among both communities, and pro-French elements among the Christians began to raise their heads again. It would be going too far to say that any party (apart from the unsuccessful Parti Populaire Syrien) was prepared to promote actively the disintegration of the Lebanon, but more and more Lebanese were coming to regard such a disintegration as inevitable or even desirable. As against this tendency, however, the instability of the outside world, particularly of Syria, and the large vested interests in the present régime reinforced natural inertia to produce a fairly widespread feeling of opposition to a change in the status of the country unless it could no longer be avoided.

The same inertia, vested interests and lack of a clear alternative explain the seeming paradox of the Lebanon being able, in spite of all internal strains, to maintain a stable Government throughout the year. Sheikh Bechara al Khoury, whose re-election as President had been voted in 1948, was duly reinaugurated for a further term of six years on 21st September. Riad el Solh held on to office as Prime Minister and his Cabinet, apart from a few changes and reshuffles, remained substantially the same. In the Chamber the Government could count on the votes of forty-five out of fifty-five deputies. In spite of his growing unpopularity in the country as a whole and the weakening of his Cabinet through failure to maintain adequate Maronite representation after the resignation of Gabriel Murr in July and Hamid Frangié at the end of September, the Prime Minister even strengthened his position in the political field, as result of his opponents' mistakes and the failure of the President to win enough independent support to terminate a growingly irksome partnership.

The opposition parties, who could muster only up to ten votes in the Chamber and whose main strength lay outside it, made serious efforts to co-operate among themselves, and a Committee of National Liberation, in which Abdul Hamid Kerameh, Camille Chamoun and Kemal Jumblatt were the most prominent figures, united most of the groups outside the National

bloc of Emile Eddé (who died in October and was succeeded in the leadership of the party by his son Raymond). However, the only really strong link between them was opposition to the existing régime, and they were divided among themselves as to how far this opposition should be pushed. Unfortunately for the country they committed themselves to a policy of regarding the existing Chamber of Deputies as illegal, on the ground that the elections of 1947 had been fraudulent. This attitude united the great majority of the Chamber against them, alienated moderate opposition elements and made it more difficult for them to come to terms with the President, whose re-election had also to be regarded as illegal. However, relations between the President and some of the opposition leaders, notably Abdul Hamid Kerameh, were never entirely broken off, and towards the end of the year the vociferous insistence on the necessity for fresh elections as the only way out of an *impasse* which was partly of the opposition's own making seemed to be having some effect. A door was thus left open in spite of apparent intransigence, but the opposition must share with the Government responsibility for the failure of the country's leaders to achieve anything constructive during the year.

In 1948 the Palestine trouble and the immediate problem of the refugees had provided a good excuse for postponing the introduction of those reforms which all regarded as necessary to educate the people in democracy, ameliorate their material condition and give them an interest in supporting the authorities instead of thwarting them in the traditional manner. That the time had come for action was admitted by the Government in numerous promises made in the course of the year, particularly in January and at the time of the President's reinauguration. In spite of much talk, however, but slight progress was made in any direction. Draft Bills for the reorganisation of the Civil Service and the setting up of a State Audit Department, published in January, were quickly pigeon-holed. A draft social security law was published in May but was soon withdrawn for revision and had not appeared again by the end of the year. A new electoral law was intermittently discussed and shelved in May. In October publicity was given to a grandiose Six-Year Plan for economic and social development, but by the end of the December it became

evident that the Government had got no further than sketching out the broad outlines. The only positive measure showing ability to react to the needs of the situation was the voting in April of a supplementary credit for the re-equipment and modernisation of the armed forces; but a Cabinet decision to introduce conscription was quickly forgotten. As against this, work on the Khalde airport is proceeding rapidly and the main channels of the Qasmiyeh irrigation scheme on the Litani have now been completed.

A more serious charge against the Government than its failure to make progress was that it showed itself increasingly incapable of carrying out the primary duties of any Government, namely, the administration of justice and the maintenance of law and order. The failure in one field reacted on the other. By laxity in arresting culprits, by commutation of sentences and by frequent amnesties the authorities deprived lawbreaking of its sanctions. By allowing the open cultivation of hashish by the side of public roads and by encouraging their own supporters in "the street" to carry and fire off pistols, rifles and even tommy guns in public demonstrations the Government encouraged the flouting of the law. From the point of view of the security of a State possessing an army of only 3,000 men the most alarming symptom of the year was the increasing resort to violence. Hardly a day passed without a report of murder or attempted murder, and there were scores of faction fights involving several fatal casualties, the victims as often as not being innocent bystanders. The danger of such a situation was well illustrated at the end of September when a hashish quarrel between Moslem and Christian villages north-west of Baalbek spread to a wider area and set Maronites and Shias at loggerheads. Later in the year Dendache bandits in the Hermel area were staging hold-ups on the main road to Homs, without the gendarmerie or military being able to stop them.

The only occasion during the year when the authorities acted with real vigour was when they themselves were the object of attack. At the beginning of June the Government had collected evidence pointing to a possible attempt at a *coup d'Etat* by the Parti Populaire Syrien, a Right-wing, quasi-Fascist movement, aiming at the union of the Lebanon with Syria and Jordan and directed, from Syria, by

Antoun Saadé. In view of the situation inside Syria the threat had to be taken seriously, and the authorities decided to strike first. Following a small incident in a Beirut suburb 250 members of the party were arrested. In retaliation the party, allegedly under instructions from Antoun Saadé, organised attacks on gendarmerie posts, two raids, in the Bekaa, actually being carried out by bands which crossed from the Syrian side of the frontier. The Lebanese Government, however, were on the whole well prepared and repaid violence with violence. As a result Husni Zaim, who was popularly believed to be behind the movement, decided that Antoun Saadé could be of no use to him and on 7th July he handed him over to the Lebanese. He was shot at dawn the following day, after a short trial before a military tribunal. The secrecy and speed with which the whole operation was carried out deeply shocked even those who had least sympathy with Antoun Saadé and a potential martyr has been created for some future turn of events. But in view of the danger of agitation in Syria and the support which Antoun Saadé might have been able to mobilise in the Lebanon it was generally understood that if the thing were to be done at all it had to be done quickly and the Government's action, though distasteful, was excused by the majority of a public which is more impressed by strength than justice.

To the long-term danger from the Communists the Government was characteristically less sensitive and although the Communist leader, Mustapha Ariss, who had been released from a short term of imprisonment in January, was behind bars again at the end of the year, no really effective action was taken to discourage the rank and file of the party or to win the workers away from it by social reforms. On the whole there was probably some slight spread of Communist influence and there was a noticeable increase in the number of fellow travellers among journalists and lawyers.

In foreign affairs the year began with the ominous realisation that the new State of Israel, with a frontier bordering on the Lebanon, had come to stay. The armistice signed on 23rd March, however, relieved the Government of an immediate embarrassment, since it was followed by the evacuation of five Lebanese villages and ended an intervention which had never received the wholehearted support of the Christians.

For the rest of the year the Lebanon was careful to act correctly from an Arab viewpoint by continuing the boycott of Israel and resolutely refusing to consider recognition, while Christian as well as anti-Hashemite susceptibilities were met by insistence on the internationalisation of Jerusalem.

The precarious position of the Lebanon in the aftermath of the Arab defeat was considerably worsened when the bedrock of its foreign policy, the special relationship with Syria, turned into a shifting quicksand after Colonel Husni Zaim's *coup d'Etat* at the end of March. It is true that divergent economic interests and in particular the Lebanon's separate signature of a financial agreement with France in February had already subjected the special relationship to some strain, but the fall of President Kuwatly, who was a personal friend of Riad Solh, and the advent of the unpredictable Zaim, who had a personal dislike for the Lebanese Prime Minister, produced a state of tension between the two countries which in the first half of May resulted in the closure of the frontiers after a Syrian patrol had been arrested in Lebanese territory. Lebanese fears were increased by the suspicion that Zaim was abetting the Parti Populaire Syrien, but on Marshal Zaim's agreeing to hand over Antoun Saadé the Government stomached its resentment and sent a delegation to congratulate the Marshal on his election to the Presidency. A wheat and customs agreement was signed at Chtaura at the same time and relations seemed to be approaching normal again, but the Lebanese were unreservedly glad when Zaim was deposed and shot in the middle of August.

In regard to the Arab States as a whole the Prime Minister continued to play his customary rôle of mediator—particularly in easing the tension between Egypt and Iraq—and consistently but unavailingly pressed for a meeting of the Arab League. Anxiety about Syria, as well as fear of Israel, was already causing the Lebanese to look for friends among the other Arab States before the project of union between Syria and Iraq came to the fore. When union became a live issue at the beginning of October the Lebanese Government were gravely alarmed. Although nearly all Lebanese were agreed in hoping that the project could be postponed until a more suitable moment, there was a deep divergence of views (not altogether following

confessional lines, since the Maronite Camille Chamoun was a strong advocate of union) as to what should be done if there was a strong chance of union being achieved. The Prime Minister, determined not to be on the losing side and solicitous for his reputation as an Arab patriot, let it be known in private that he was working for union but proclaimed in public that his Government's policy was one of strict neutrality. The President, on the other hand, instructed Lebanese representatives abroad to work against union and put out feelers about an Anglo-French guarantee of the Lebanon's frontiers. Both President and Prime Minister, however, agreed in welcoming the Arab League meeting in Cairo, and the Lebanese tried to make of it something more than a red herring by strongly supporting the Egyptian collective security plan and by putting up an economic security plan of their own. The eventual apparent collapse of the Syro-Iraqi union project stopped the rift in the Lebanon's unity from driving deeper, but the disappearance of the older generation of politicians in the Syrian elections and the Syrian army's continued intervention in politics forboded a further period of tension and uncertainty.

In their relations with the Western Powers the Lebanese showed their usual concern to balance their commitments towards the Arab world by holding out a hand to their Mediterranean neighbours. Hence the signature of agreements such as a Treaty of Friendship and Commerce with Italy and a Cultural Convention with Greece. The Lebanon also continued to attach great importance to its United Nations activities, partly because the United Nations provides a screen onto which the picture of Lebanese patriotism can be projected, and partly because the Lebanon has been brought into very intimate touch with the United Nations as a result of Beirut becoming the centre for so many of the organisations activities—those for instance of the Conciliation Commission, Relief for Palestine Commission, Children's Emergency Fund, the Economic Survey Mission and temporary subsidiary gatherings such as the United Nations Social Welfare Seminar for Arab States. The Lebanese had retained no illusions, however, about the ability of the United Nations to protect the territorial integrity of their country and the main preoccupation of their Western policy, therefore, was to reach an agreement with Great Britain

or even France which would insure them against Israel and reinsure them against their Moslem Arab allies. A proposal for a treaty with Great Britain was put forward informally in the early summer and during the Syro-Iraqi union scare a further suggestion of an Anglo-French guarantee was made, but neither His Majesty's Government nor the French Government was willing to enter into any commitment: nor did the Government of the United States respond to similar feelers.

In the activities of foreign Powers inside the Lebanon the most noteworthy development was a recovery of French influence. This was partly the result of the discredit into which the régime associated with the anti-French policy had fallen, but it was also the fruit of a wise policy combining abstention from open interference in political matters, discreet assistance when opportunities arose, a more ostentatious cultural drive, and an insidious economic penetration which, with the onset of the slump, added many more of the leading personalities and institutions to the list of the Banque de Syrie's creditors. Among the business community the linking of the Lebanese pound with the French franc, which was continued by the financial agreement of February, a fairly liberal French policy in exchange matters and large French purchases of Lebanese commodities reinforced the traditional connexions with France. Among the Christians as a whole the French increased their prestige by the part which they were believed to have played in upholding the independence of Syria.

Of the other Powers the United States spent much money on propaganda and the influx of Transarabian Pipe Line personnel after the signature of the Tapline Agreement in the spring brought Americans more into the public eye, but American support of Zionism on the one hand and the known limitation of American commitments to Greece, Turkey and Persia on the other prevented the influence of the United States from becoming an important factor in Lebanese affairs. Russian influence was bound up with the fortunes of the Com-

munist Party and to a certain extent it exercised a pull on the Greek Orthodox Church, but in spite of the Lebanon's disappointments in other quarters there was no sign of a turn to Russia for protection.

The United Kingdom's position in Lebanese esteem suffered a decline in the course of the year. One reason was that the freedom which the British were credited with having brought the Lebanon no longer seemed such a priceless gift. Another was that British policy, with its encouragement of Arab unity and its alleged influence on Jordan and Iraq, was held to be responsible for some of the Lebanon's difficulties. In particular the Lebanese found it hard to believe that the British were not behind the project for union between Syria and Iraq. More important than all however was the realisation that little material help or protection could be expected from the United Kingdom for some time to come. Nevertheless British influence held the lead and remained a powerful factor. Relations between the Lebanese Government and His Majesty's Legation continued to be close and cordial, and the advice of His Majesty's Minister was sought on many important issues. While the Lebanon pursued a policy in the Middle East which sometimes ran counter to British interests, for instance in refusing to allow shipments of oil to Haifa, His Majesty's Government could usually count on Lebanese support at Lake Success. In general, confidence in Britain's future was upheld, the steep fall in the sterling exchange rate reflecting the influence of other free markets rather than a pessimistic local appreciation of the situation. Finally, the most encouraging sign from a long-term point of view was that during the year (mainly as the result of the cheapening of sterling) Great Britain took the lead from the United States as the largest supplier of the Lebanese market.

Beirut,
31st January, 1950.

POLITICAL SITUATION IN THE LEBANON

Sir W. Houstoun-Boswall to Mr. Bevin. (Received 13th February)

(No. 22) Beirut,
Sir, 31st January, 1950.

In the annual report for 1949 which I had the honour to submit under cover of my despatch No. 21⁽¹⁾ of 31st January, I drew attention to the gradual decline in the ability of the Lebanese Government to handle the day-to-day problems of administration. The Lebanon undoubtedly gives an impression of stability for there has been no significant change in the Government for over two years, nor, with the exception of the abortive revolt of the Parti Populaire Syrien last June, which the Government handled with commendable energy, has there been any serious challenge to its authority. But this impression of stability is largely illusory and to meet mounting criticism the Government has recently made a number of changes in the ranks of the senior permanent officials. The ostensible aim was to effect an improvement in the efficiency of the administration but undoubtedly a further consideration was the importance of having trusty leaders in key positions in good time for the general election which must in any case be held before May 1951 and will probably be held this autumn. Anis Bey Saleh, who has replaced George Bey Haimari as Acting Director-General of the Ministry of the Interior, is indeed being more energetic than his predecessor and is behaving for the time being in the manner of the traditional new broom, but he is said to be no less adept than the man he has replaced in election rigging. Indeed any Director-General of the Interior who failed to play his part in this respect would quickly be replaced. Among the more important of those also displaced is the head of the Gendarmerie, Colonel Rifai, who has been promoted to the rank of Colonel-General and given a sinecure. He is perhaps one of the few men who is capable of staging a successful *coup d'état* in this country, and this may be one of the causes for his dismissal. But changes in the personnel of a few Government departments (especially when an ulterior motive is suspected) are merely an ineffective and obvious sop to public opinion which is becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the corruption, intrigue and nepotism which characterise the present régime.

2. One of the underlying causes is undoubtedly the *scrutin de liste* electoral system, whereby, in each of the five Mohafazats of the Lebanon, the elector votes not for an individual candidate but for a list of candidates who if elected will represent the whole Mohafazat. This practice has increased the power of the leading personalities in each of the Mohafazats, such as Ahmed Bey el Asaad in South Lebanon and Sabry Bey Hamade in the Bekaa, since they are in a position to select the candidates who are to appear on their lists, and prospective deputies have to pay large sums in order to be included. Amounts ranging from £5,000 to £20,000 are not uncommon and as much as £50,000 has actually been paid for this privilege of even getting on the list. The Opposition originally put forward a demand calling for the sub-division of the Mohafazats into constituencies (Cazas) in which there would be a straight fight between the candidates, thus avoiding this abuse. Most of the opposition members, however, are no longer pressing for this and it now seems likely that the President will decide to increase the number of seats in the Chamber so that most of the important political figures at present outside the Chamber will be able to return after the new elections. If, as seems likely, the elections are again rigged the possibility of some bloodshed, particularly in the Mount Lebanon area, cannot be excluded.

3. Much of the blame for the present state of affairs must, however, be laid personally at the door of the President and the Prime Minister. In recent months the President has fallen more and more under the influence of his younger brother, Sheikh Selim el Khoury. Sheikh Selim is not much seen in public, but he commands influence in Mount Lebanon which from the point of view of the elections is the most crucial Mohafazat. This Mohafazat has the largest representation in the Chamber and at the same time is the one in which opposition to the present régime, led by Raymond Eddé, Camille Chamoun and Kamal Jumblatt, is most determined. The President relies more and more on his brother to secure a majority over the factions which oppose him. Much

⁽¹⁾ No. 2 in this Volume.

of Sheikh Selim's counsel is wise and useful, but he exacts his toll by the appointment of his myrmidons in all branches of the administration.

4. Other members of the President's family also benefit from their relationship, particularly his son Sheikh Khalil, to whom litigants and others go in the usually successful hope that by his influence he can move matters in their favour, whilst Sheikh Zu'aid, another of the President's brothers, is a contractor who is on the Government list and as the controller of the only manufacturing company has a monopoly of cement.

5. The Prime Minister and the President have not been on the best of terms for some time and the recent administrative changes are publicly said to be a victory for the President over the Prime Minister. There is no doubt that Riad Bey Solh excels at the subtleties of intrigue and he has successfully held together a Government which has little or no common denominator. But in the field of administration he is sadly lacking and takes little interest in that aspect of public affairs even when, as now, he is Minister of the Interior. Apart from a sporadic outburst of energy at the time of the revolt of the Parti Populaire Syrien, there has been a steady deterioration in law and order, and the administration of justice has been subject to such abuse that the President of the Courts, Judge Emile Tyan, resigned as a protest against the influence brought to bear upon him in the course of trials. Murders are of frequent occurrence, but through the "protection" of those in high places, few of those responsible are made to answer for their crimes. Then, too, the Government has been unable to extend its writ to cover the Dendache tribe in the Bekaa which, although consisting only of a small number of armed men, has nevertheless immobilised large forces of Government troops and through the personal intervention of Sabry Bey Hamade, the President of the Chamber of Deputies has even succeeded in negotiating an amnesty for those of its members against whom charges are pending for assassination and brigandage. The Government has been impotent to take effective action against them since the villages round about are entirely in sympathy with the Dendaches who are often kinsmen, and also because members of the Government—especially Sabry Hamade—and local inhabitants alike have a considerable stake in the illegal cultivation and smuggling of hashish, which is said to constitute

one of the more valuable exports of the Lebanon at the present time.

6. Lastly in the legislative field the Government has a poor record. Most of the meetings of the Chamber have been taken up in personal vituperation between members of the Government and the Opposition. Much of the legislation that has been introduced has been ill-considered and badly drafted and numerous bills have been shelved and not heard of again, such as those for the re-organisation of the Civil Service, the establishment of a State Audit Department, the Six-Year Development Plan and the Conscription Bill. The Social Security Plan originally inspired largely by British advice is, in its present form, actuarially unsound as the Lebanese authorities have repeatedly been told by the labour adviser of the British Middle East Office. It has now been withdrawn for further consideration because of the opposition it has met with in both labour and employers' circles.

7. That there is a general air of stability in spite of everything may be attributed to cynical indifference rather than to contentment. After centuries of Turkish rule, when they were left largely to their own devices, and nearly a quarter of a century of corrupt French administration, when they were not, the soft and material minded Lebanese have, I fear, come to regard venality, nepotism and political jobbery as qualities almost essentially inherent in those holding positions of power and influence. They accept that state of affairs with a resigned philosophy, doubtless fortified by the knowledge that if they themselves should ever attain to any situation where pressure could be exerted on the less fortunate they would take full advantage of it. And one sees this in every walk of life. This unhappy mentality does, indeed, disgust some of the youth—at any rate while they are young. So if the young men are given opportunities before they become too disillusioned, and a good example, there may yet be hope for improvement. After all, the country has enjoyed real independence for only six years. Nevertheless conditions are such that if ever a really strong Syria emerged, whether from union with Iraq, Jordan or both, the Lebanon might well disintegrate from sheer inanition and lack of incentive for the Moslems to continue the Compromise of 1943.

I am sending copies of this despatch to His Majesty's Minister at Damascus and to the Head of the British Middle East Office.

I have, &c.

W. E. HOUSTOUN-BOSWALL.

THE LEBANON AND THE EASTERN AND WESTERN BLOCS

Sr W. Houstoun-Boswall to Mr. Bevin. (Received 29th February)

No. 32)

Beirut,

21st February, 1950.

Sir, I have the honour to report that on 8th February the Lebanese Prime Minister made a statement in the Chamber of Deputies concerning the position of the Lebanese Government in relation to the division of the world into Eastern and Western blocs.

2. The occasion was a message read in the Chamber and written by a pro-Communist organisation called the "League of Democratic Lawyers." (It is a curious custom here that anyone may write to the Chamber apparently, just as we can to, say, *The Times*.) This letter accused the Government of permitting the police to use torture to secure confessions and to use firearms against peaceful demonstrators during recent incidents in Beirut and Tripoli. Immediately it had been read, the Prime Minister jumped to his feet and stated that any Police Officer found guilty of using torture would be punished severely under the existing law and that as regards the use of firearms the demonstrators were the first to fire.

3. Deputy Adel Bey Osseyran then enquired whether the Government was against Communists or neutral and whether the Government policy was pro-Western bloc or pro-Eastern bloc. The Prime Minister in reply then said: "There is a great difference between the question of West and East on the one hand, and this question (i.e., Communist activity in the Lebanon) on the other. We are neutral and will follow a Lebanese policy that concerns the Lebanon only. As regards whether we recognise communism or no, we shall oppose any destructive movement regardless whether it comes from the West or the East."

4. This statement caused somewhat of a stir in local circles. Opponents of the Government endeavoured to represent it as a new departure in Government policy, which by its acts at least has been hostile to Communists and in the United Nations has generally sided with the Western bloc. In fact, however, it constitutes no change in the official policy of the Government which has no alliances with countries in either bloc. When speaking to a member of my

staff the Prime Minister, realising that this bald statement had given rise to some misgivings, at first claimed that he had been misquoted and somewhat illogically blamed Reuters for so doing. Nevertheless the newspaper versions are substantially the same as the official record of the Chamber from which the above extract is taken.

5. A few days later, on 13th February, the Prime Minister took the opportunity to endeavour to counteract the impression he had given. Deputy Osseyran asked in the Chamber whether the recent speech which Dr. Charles Malik, Lebanese Delegate to the United Nations, had made before the Political Committee of the General Assembly on 23rd November, attacking communism, represented the Government's policy and how it could be reconciled with the Prime Minister's previous declaration that the Lebanon was neutral in so far as the question of West and East was concerned. In reply the Prime Minister said: "At the last meeting Adel Bey (Osseyran) asked me a question about the Communist demonstration at Debbas Square and wanted to know if we were bound in our policy to East or West. I told him that there was no connexion between these two questions and that our policy was inspired by the Lebanon's interests. Dr. Charles Malik's address fully represented the Lebanon's views but there is nothing in it that binds the Government to any bloc. I would like to reassure Adel Bey that we are bound in our general policy to the policy of the United Nations which we have pursued at all its meetings and conferences. On the other hand our Arab policy is bound by the covenant of the Arab League. Whenever we bind ourselves to any bloc I shall indicate the fact to Adel Bey."

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SUSPENSION OF THE CUSTOMS UNION BETWEEN SYRIA AND THE LEBANON

Sir W. Houstoun-Boswall to Mr. Bevin. (Received 14th March)

(No. 100)
(Telegraphic)

Beirut,
14th March, 1950.

My despatch No. 34 E: Syrian-Lebanese Economic Relations.

Following the Syrian Government's announcement last night of suspension of Customs Union between Syria and Lebanon, the Lebanese Government have instituted the following temporary measures.

2. Goods arriving in Lebanon and destined for Syria will now have to pay customs duties in Lebanese pounds and not in Syrian pounds as has been permissible hitherto.

3. Control posts at frontiers were to-day allowing passage of goods into Lebanon after examination but customs dues have not yet been charged.

4. The Syrian pound was quoted in Beirut free market at 16 per cent. discount this morning but recovered later to 12 per cent.

5. A meeting is being held tonight attended by members of the Administration and representatives of the leading commercial organisations to discuss what further measures may be adopted.

POLITICAL SUMMARY FOR MARCH, 1950

Sir W. Houstoun-Boswall to Mr. Younger. (Received 18th April)

Beirut,
1st April, 1950.

An unsuccessful attempt was made on the life of the Lebanese Prime Minister on 9th March. At about 6-30 p.m. that evening as he was crossing the pavement from his car about to enter a friend's house, Riad Bey Solh was fired at from very short range, but the shots went wide. The Prime Minister's bodyguard returned the fire and injured the assailant, a twenty-three year old Druze named Tewfik Hamdan. Hamdan was found to be a member of the outlawed Parti Populaire Syrien and a cousin of a member of that party who was executed following the abortive revolt in July 1949. In the fight two children were killed and one child and one adult injured. The attempted assassination caused great indignation throughout the country and crowds flocked to Riad Bey's house to express their congratulations to him on his escape.

2. At the meeting of the Chamber of Deputies on 13th March the Prime Minister was warmly applauded and the only discordant note came from Kamal Bey Jumblatt who continued his personal attacks on Riad Bey Solh which have led to so many brushes in the Chamber in recent months. At the end of the session the Prime Minister

introduced a law giving the Government increased powers in the event of a "State of Alert" being proclaimed and giving the Parquet the right to prohibit the publication of news which might disturb public security.

3. Police and night watchmen on duty outside His Majesty's Legation reported two small explosions in the roadway on the evening of 28th March. There was no damage of any kind and no clue could be found as to the cause. The local press suggested that the alleged attack was made by sympathisers of Haj Amin el Hussein.

4. The steadily deteriorating relations between the Lebanon and Syria in the economic sphere finally resulted in the Syrian Government's announcement on 14th March that the existing Customs Union between the two countries would cease from that date. The Syrian Government's unilateral denunciation came as a complete surprise, not only to the Lebanese public, but also to officials of the Lebanese administration. On 7th March the Syrian Government had presented a Note requesting that as a basis for negotiations the Lebanese should accept the principle of complete economic unity and a reply to this proposal was requested before 20th March. The Lebanese Government replied on 10th March explaining that

the principle of complete economic unity would not be acceptable in view of the conflicting interests of the two countries. They nevertheless expressed a hope that the outstanding difficulties might be resolved by friendly negotiation while reserving to themselves the right to take such measures as they conceived to be necessary in their own interests. The prompt and uncompromising Syrian refusal to continue on this basis considerably shook public opinion. Since the rupture of the Customs Union the Lebanese have done what they can to maintain a dignified and somewhat passive attitude and they have sought to avoid any measures which might tend to aggravate the quarrel. The movement of goods between the two countries has now largely come to a stand-still and the Lebanese have instituted an independent customs administration. Although little progress has been made at Governmental levels, unofficial discussions have taken place between representatives of local commercial organisations with a view to seeking some common ground on which the two Governments can negotiate a settlement.

5. The Syrian Prime Minister, Khaled Bey el Azm, passed through Beirut on 23rd March on his way to the meeting of the Political Committee of the Arab League in Cairo and had conversations with the Lebanese Prime Minister. It is understood that they discussed items on the agenda of the Arab League meeting and matters arising from the economic separation of the two countries. Riad Bey Solh left for Cairo on 28th March.

6. Anti-Jordan feeling rose and fell during the course of the month. There was a wave of indignation following reports that King Abdullah had signed a Peace Treaty with Israel on board a yacht in the Gulf of Akaba in the presence of British and American Ambassadors; but when it was clear that these reports were false, feeling abated somewhat, only to be exacerbated once again by the publication in the Egyptian press of documents purporting to prove that King Abdullah had been negotiating with Israel even during the Palestinian war. When it was seen, however, that the Arab League was endeavouring to avoid open rupture with Jordan, feeling moderated considerably.

7. On 27th March a partial strike occurred in the Iraq Petroleum Company installations and area headquarters at Tripoli. The refinery was not affected but strikers occupied the offices and terminal installation thereby preventing the loading of tankers with crude oil for Europe. The initial cause was the dismissal of some seventy-five Lebanese employees without the corresponding dismissal of any Palestinians or Europeans. A few days later a number of Palestinians were dismissed, but as the men's leaders had been told by the management that large scale dismissals were planned within the next two years, certain sections struck work. The Government appears to be most anxious to avoid any untoward incidents since feeling has been running high over the strike in Tripoli town, which is predominantly Moslem and has strong irredentist leanings towards Syria. With the somewhat strained relations with that country the Lebanese Government fear the consequences if turmoil were to break loose. Matters were not improved when on the first day of the strike one of the labour contractors employed by the company, Soliman Frangieh (a brother of Hamid Frangieh, the previous Minister for Foreign Affairs) brought down a force of armed men from Zghorta to "protect" the company. He was promptly persuaded to send the men home but the opposition of the followers of Abdul Hamid Kerame (who is in London) was aroused and it was feared that these might give trouble if force were employed. There is every evidence that the strike is organised by the Phalangist Party of Pierre Gemayel.

8. Khalil Bey Abu Jaudé has taken over the portfolios of Information and Posts and Telegraphs.

9. Dr. Barakat Ali Quereichi presented his credentials as Pakistani Minister on 7th March. He is normally resident in Damascus.

10. The new Iraqi Minister, Ibrahim Bey Khodeiri, presented his credentials on 21st March.

11. M. Franz Kappeler presented to the Minister for Foreign Affairs on 1st March the letters accrediting him as Swiss Chargé d'Affaires *en pied* in the Lebanon.

POLITICAL CORRUPTION IN THE LEBANON

Sir W. Houstoun-Boswall to Mr. Younger. (Received 21st July)

(No. 78)

Beirut,

Sir,

12th July, 1950.

At the beginning of the year I felt that the length of time which the present Lebanese Government had remained in office, with only minor changes, might possibly have given rise to the impression in some quarters that whatever storms might rage across the Syrian frontier, there were no clouds over the mountains of the Lebanon. It was to correct any such impression that I had the honour to address to you my despatch No. 22⁽¹⁾ of 31st January, and I am sorry to say that nothing has occurred since then to make me alter my view that the political leadership of the country is rotten to the core. A special article in *The Times* of 16th June referred to the Lebanon's "most corrupt administration." This has caused much righteous indignation, but the Middle East correspondent was not overstating his case.

2. I need not trouble you with a detailed account of the sordid personal intrigues that pass for political activity in this nominally democratic country; one or two recent episodes, all too typical of the way the Lebanon is run, will suffice. In the middle of June the Chief of Police, Nasr Bey Raad, suddenly sent for M. Saïd Freyha, the owner-editor of the weekly paper *As-Sayyad*, and interrogated him about an article which had been published in the paper some three weeks previously criticising the Administration and, at least by implication, the President of the Republic. Nasr Bey Raad is a protégé of Sheikh Selim el-Khoury, the President's younger brother, while M. Freyha is a close personal friend of the Prime Minister, Riad Bey Solh. The action taken by the Chief of the Police was, in any event, somewhat arbitrary but in the special circumstances it was positively foolhardy. You will remember from previous reports of mine that there is no love lost between Riad Bey Solh and Sheikh Selim; and the fat was quickly in the fire. The Prime Minister, who is also Minister of the Interior, felt that the Chief of Police had overstepped his powers in taking this high-handed action without consulting him. He was furious and would certainly have dis-

missed Nasr Bey Raad if the President had allowed him to do so, but the latter, who is anxious to have his brother on his side for the next elections (Sheikh Selim wields much influence in Mount Lebanon) counselled moderation all round, and a decree was issued giving the Chief of Police a month's leave and appointing Izzat Bey Korshid, the Director of Protocol and a former Chief of Police, to act as Chief of Police in his absence.

3. This compromise satisfied neither side. Sheikh Selim demanded the immediate reinstatement of his protégé and called for the resignation of the Government. He threatened to send his followers down from the hills to make armed demonstrations in the suburbs of Beirut. As the President, who with every justification was convinced that at best this could only provoke communal trouble, felt that he could not rely on the police (for Sheikh Selim has a great number of partisans and "protected persons" holding tactical positions in the security forces and, for that matter, most departments of the Government), he sent for the head of the gendarmerie and the Commander-in-chief of the army and told them to take the necessary measures to forestall the threatened disturbances. His Excellency also issued explicit orders to the local authorities concerned to the same end. In the event, Sheikh Selim did not try to force the issue, but he is still pressing for Nasr Raad to be recalled, and the bitter hatred which the Prime Minister and the President's brother now feel for each other puts the President himself in a position of some delicacy. In fact, he said to me only the other day: "As you know, I have one brother who is, as it were, 'more royal than the King.' His misguided attempts to help are often most embarrassing. I cannot eliminate him (and his Excellency certainly does not want to, even if he dared), but I can take and have taken strong measures to maintain law and order." And this is true so far.

4. M. Freyha was sentenced to three months' imprisonment and a fine of £L. 200, the writer of the offending article to one month's imprisonment and a fine of

⁽¹⁾ No. 3 in this Volume

£L. 100, and the paper has been suspended for six months; but it is the effect of the episode on the relations between the political personalities involved, and on the public which has followed the whole affair with cynical disgust, which is of real importance—not the verdict. Almost every day there is fresh evidence of corruption in high places, and the best elements among the senior civil servants are no less disgusted and discouraged than the public. Some months ago M. Basil Trad, who was appointed Secretary-General of the Ministry of National Economy towards the end of last year, told the commercial secretary of His Majesty's Legation that when he assumed his duties he found that there were seventy officials, the majority of them young, who had not only no work allotted to them, but did not even have a desk or place to sit within the Ministry. They apparently attended the Ministry only occasionally and spent the rest of their time at leisure although drawing salaries. (But that is not a rare phenomenon; I remember it was the same and worse in Spain nearly thirty years ago.) M. Trad's first task was, therefore, to draw up a scheme of reorganisation within the Ministry, but he had met with nothing but obstruction and had at last received a strong hint that it would be better for him to leave matters as they were. Last month he resigned in despair, having realised at last that nothing useful was ever likely to be accomplished. It would not surprise me if the Director-General of the Ministry of Agriculture followed him into the wilderness for similar reasons of frustration before very long. He, a Christian, is at loggerheads with

his Druze Minister, who, by way of retaliation for the Director-General's resistance to his nepotism and communal favouritism, has actually openly sabotaged at least two promising agricultural projects. In one instance the Minister has deliberately withdrawn the guards from a recently-planted forest area, which has now been destroyed by the ravages of goats. And there are other glaring cases of this nature.

5. When everyone in the country from top to bottom knows that personal ambition is the dominating motive in the mind of nearly every member of the Government, efficiency and progress are not to be expected. If the Lebanon were a democratic country in more than name there could be little doubt about the issue of the elections; the present Administration, which has enjoyed and abused power for a good many years now, would go. As it is, the people are so apathetic and the President of the Republic and Riad Bey Solh so astute, that on present form, despite the lesson of the Turkish elections (and, indeed, possibly because of it!), it is as likely as not that the Prime Minister and the same clique will still be in the saddle when the dust settles after the elections; but they will have to raise enough dust to conceal their electoral methods, as I doubt whether even the docile Lebanese could stand for a repetition of the blatant trickery employed in May 1947.

6. I am sending copies of this despatch to His Majesty's Minister at Damascus and to the head of the British Middle East Office.

I have, &c.

W. E. HOUSTOUN-BOSWALL.

NEW ELECTORAL LAW IN THE LEBANON

Sir W. Houstoun-Boswall to Mr. Bevin. (Received 25th August)

(No. 89)

Beirut,

Sir,

19th August, 1950.

I have the honour to transmit herewith a translation⁽¹⁾ in French of the text of the new Electoral Law which was passed by the Chamber of Deputies on 8th August and promulgated by the President of the Republic on 11th August.

2. Under the terms of this new law, the number of Deputies in the Chamber has been increased from 55 to 77 and the number of electoral districts from 5 to 9, the system of *scrutin de liste* being retained.

3. In my despatch No. 22 of 31st January, I mentioned that an increase in the number of Deputies was likely to be made in order

⁽¹⁾ Not printed.

to find seats for some of the political figures for whom a place could not be found in the Chamber during the 1947 elections. The actual campaign for a revision of the Electoral Law began on 7th June, when Henri Bey Pharaon issued a declaration recommending that in future electoral districts should be based on the Qazas instead of the Mohafazats. (A Qaza is a subdivision of a Mohafazat and, whereas the country is divided into only five Mohafazats, there are 18 Qazas in addition to the Mohafazat of Beirut, which is an administrative unit.) This proposal was strongly supported by the *Bloc National*, i.e., the Maronites following Raymond Eddé, and by a number of Deputies from Mount Lebanon. On the other hand, the two feudal leaders, Sabri Bey Hamadi from the Beqas and his father-in-law Ahmed Bey el Asaad from South Lebanon—both Shias—opposed the scheme since they feared that, if put into effect, their power and influence would be at an end. As I suggested in my despatch No. 22 of 31st January, these two leaders are in a position to dictate which candidates shall be on their list—often for a substantial financial consideration—and also they control a large *bloc* in the Chamber.

4. The President of the Republic saw the possibilities of Henri Bey Pharaon's proposals to increase the number of Deputies and at the same time reduce the dependence of Deputies on one or two leaders. At the same time it was vital that he should not alienate the two Shia' leaders, on whose support his Excellency is largely dependent. Accordingly, a compromise was devised whereby those Mohafazats which returned over fifteen Deputies to the previous Parliament should be divided, whereas those that returned less than that number should remain as they are, merely increasing the number of their Deputies. In this way Mount Lebanon and North Lebanon have both been divided into three electoral districts whereas the Beqaa and South Lebanon, in which Sabri Bey Hamadi and Ahmed Bey el Asaad predominate respectively, have been left untouched. Although this is a substantial modification of Henri Bey Pharaon's original proposal, he himself was released from his dependence on Sabri Bey Hamadi, since he was elected to the previous Chamber on Sabri Bey Hamadi's list at great expense, and now hopes to form his own list in Beirut.

5. Those Members of Parliament from Mount Lebanon who support the Government are also satisfied by the division into three electoral districts. The *Bloc National*, on the other hand, are particularly dissatisfied since there will now be fewer Maronite Deputies in the new Chamber proportionately than there were in the old. They appealed to the Maronite Patriarch, who called a conference of Maronite religious and political leaders at Dimane at which a number of resolutions were passed calling upon the Government to give increased representation to the Maronites particularly in view of the large numbers of Maronites overseas who still retain Lebanese nationality and who, in the opinion of the Maronite Patriarch, are entitled to some form of representation in the Chamber. These representations were conveyed to the President, but, meanwhile, the law was passed by the Chamber and promulgated by the President before any determined opposition on the part of the Maronites could crystallise. In the face of the *fait accompli*, the Maronite delegates had no option but to accept as gracefully as possible the President's explanation. In fact, the Christian element still predominates in that forty-two of the Deputies will be Christians and thirty-five Moslem or Druze.

6. When I dined with the President on 17th August, his Excellency expressed himself well satisfied with the new law, which was the best compromise in present circumstances since Sabri Bey Hamadi and Ahmed Bey el Asaad would have been able to wreck it if their interests had been threatened. But at least it was a step forward. He also said that the Government would resign in December and be replaced by a Cabinet of three neutrals, who would see to it that fair elections were held. I remarked that, unfortunately, there had been an *excès de zèle* at the time of the 1947 election by some officials with the result that they could not by any stretch of imagination be held to have been impartial. Turkey had recently set a good example which might be followed with advantage here. The President agreed and assured me that the new law was but the first step in electoral reform; it did not go far enough but it would introduce many wholesome new elements and it was his wish that there should be no trickery this time. I replied that I hoped that every opportunity would be given to the several Opposition candidates to be present, if they wished, throughout the proceedings and especially

when the ballot boxes were open and the votes counted. I also suggested that Opposition suspicions might at least to some extent be allayed if an invitation were to be extended to responsible journalists from abroad, who would be in a position to confirm the facts as they saw them and thereby counteract the painful impression which had been caused by the 1947 elections on public

opinion abroad as well as in this country. The President said that he entirely agreed with me. We shall see.

I am sending copies of this despatch with enclosure to His Majesty's Minister at Damascus and to the British Middle East Office.

I have, &c.
W. E. HOUSTOUN-BOSWALL.

EY 1102/13

No. 9

ECONOMIC POLICY OF THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT

Mr. Montagu-Pollock to Mr. Bevin. (Received 23rd October)

(No. 165 E. Confidential) Damascus,
Sir, 10th October, 1950.

The Syrian Prime Minister, Nazim Qudsi, gave me on 3rd October an extensive review of his economic policy, in which he expressed great confidence in Syria's economic future. It was evident from what he said that he was taking a close personal interest in the country's economic affairs, which were being placed in a position of first importance in the general policy of his Government. I would like to give you a summary of his remarks since it may give a useful picture of the social and economic policy which he is actively pursuing whilst playing an extremely cautious hand in his political dealings. In fact, the weakness, and willingness to compromise, which he has shown in the relationships with the Syrian army leaders would to some extent be justified if the resulting absence of overt political strife could be used to set Syria on the road towards economic and social progress from which future political upheavals would be less likely to divert her.

2. Dr. Qudsi said that Syria had more reason to be optimistic about her economic future than any other Arab country. Not only did she have sufficient undeveloped fertile land for a steadily expanding population, but she had a people who were willing and capable of exploiting their opportunities. He gave as instances the rapid expansion of the annual wheat crop in north-east Syria which resulted from the restriction of wheat imports on the outbreak of war in 1939 and the remarkable increase in cotton production this year, which he hoped might be multiplied as much as five times in next year's harvest. These substantial increases in production showed the adaptability of the Syrian agriculturist in meeting changing

current demand; the war-time increase in wheat production had been achieved without outside help and despite wholly inadequate mechanical aids. He spoke with pride about the degree of mechanisation now achieved in the Jezireh, even making the doubtful claim that the number of tractors per given area of land was as great as anywhere in the world. He added that there was every sign of a drift of population back to the land in certain areas, and that he thought that this was a healthy sign. I do not think he is unaware of the advantages of a contented agricultural population as opposed to a discontented industrial one in combating communism.

3. The Prime Minister's confidence extended into the sphere of economic relations with the Lebanon. He said that the break with the Lebanon had been fully justified by results and that Syria, which had on several occasions offered complete economic unity with the Lebanon, had now withdrawn the offer. The *agio* between the currencies of the two countries had steadily fallen from some 10 per cent. in favour of Lebanese currency to a present level of 1 per cent. In two months the *agio* might well move in favour of Syrian currency. Moreover, as a result of the improved economic situation and also of Syrian restrictions on the practice of import through Lebanese middle-men, Aleppo, which was traditionally the trading centre of Syria, has benefited at the expense of Beirut and a number of Syrian merchants who used to work in Beirut have now resumed business in Aleppo and Damascus. Faced with this state of affairs the Lebanese Government might well conclude that there was a danger of economic domination by Syria and might therefore be tempted to work to overthrow

his Government. He had therefore warned them that it was not the present Government which was responsible for Syria's present economic policy but the unanimous will of the Syrian people, which would not be affected by political changes.

4. The break with the Lebanon had stimulated Syrian industry. Certain Syrian textile mills were now working twenty-four hours a day. He did not wish the measures of protection which the Government were now giving to industry to benefit only the producers. He was therefore ensuring that Government assistance to industry was used to the advantage of the consumer. When the textile industry had wished to raise its prices he had warned it that it must expect less protection if it were to do so. If there was any tendency on the part of local industry to exploit the consumer he would open the market to foreign produce. This threat usually proved effective. The sugar industry had asked for a Government loan which had only been granted on the understanding that the price of its products would become subject to Government supervision.

5. The effect of the break with the Lebanon was also noticeable on the port of Lattakia. The volume of goods passing through the port was now equivalent to what the Gibb Report had estimated might be achieved ten years after the time of writing. I am doubtful of the accuracy of this remark since I am informed that traffic passing through the port during the past twelve months has amounted to 220,000 tons, whereas I understand that the Gibb Report on the Lattakia port mentions a somewhat higher figure. Although he wished the Government to hold the majority of the shares in the enterprise, since he was convinced that it would bring in good returns, he proposed to give private interests a further opportunity of investment in it, though he would not press them in any way. His object in doing this was to ensure the tying up of a reasonable amount of vested interests in the port's future.

6. The development of the Ghab Valley would need very careful study. One of the first problems was to find the necessary finance and it was for this and for other projects that he had approached the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development. The Prime Minister felt sure that political considerations entered into the bank's decisions and for this reason he enquired whether I would request His Majesty's Government to use their influence to persuade the bank to grant Syria's appli-

cation for a loan. In reply, I told Dr. Qudsi that I had reason to believe that the bank was already anxious to help the Syrian Government, provided the latter could submit a business-like proposition. That was apparently the reason for Mr. Engert's recent visit to Damascus. At the same time it was for the very reason that the bank was a financial and not a political organisation that it was bound to insist upon suitable assurances before granting a loan, much as a private bank would do. If it failed to do so its reputation would be quickly destroyed. I therefore suggested that what was needed was, not pressure from His Majesty's Government, but that the Syrian Government should give careful consideration to the manner of their approach to the bank. Possibly, I suggested, they might be well advised to consult a financial expert as regards the formulation of this approach. The Prime Minister replied that the Syrian Government had already forwarded to the bank a number of Sir A. Gibb and Company's reports. I am somewhat concerned about this as the Syrian Government, having in the past suspected the bank of being an agent of international Jewry, now seem to be pinning on to it their main hopes for the economic development of the country. If they open their mouths too widely and in too many directions at the same time, or remain convinced that the bank can help them as soon as it is politically willing to do so, they will doubtless let themselves in for a rebuff, and this may result in their reverting to their previous suspicions of the bank's motives. I understand that two representatives of the bank are due here shortly, and I trust that any risk of future misunderstandings will be removed on that occasion.

7. Development of the Ghab Valley by the State or by a public corporation should not involve great difficulty, the Prime Minister continued, because only 10 per cent. of the area was privately owned. Ownership in the Jezireh was a more complicated problem and he was urging the completion of the cadastral survey. In the meantime the new Constitution provided that a limit should be set to the size of any individual land holding. He was anxious to encourage agricultural development and for this purpose had authorised the Agricultural Bank to issue credit to farmers for specific purposes up to a limit of £Syr.10 million. He denied that the present Syrian policy of making loans and credits available to agriculture and industry might have an inflationary effect. He thought that there

was no danger of inflation in Syria so long as the Treasury held such considerable stocks of foreign currency. Syrian exports were increasing every year and adding to her currency reserves and there was reason for cautious optimism in assessing the country's balance of payments position in the near future. The volume of currency in circulation was not large when compared with the volume of Syrian exports, and could probably be increased with profit without danger to its value on the international markets.

8. As for the danger of political instability impeding economic development the Prime Minister said that he was pressing forward urgently with the creation of the Higher Economic Council demanded by the new Constitution and he hoped to be able to announce the composition of the Council in the very near future. The creation of this Council would assure more continuity in economic development which would to some extent be removed from the sphere of future political vagaries.

9. The Prime Minister's confidence in Syria's economic future is not altogether unwarranted and I am inclined to the opinion that, given the opportunity of a stable and progressive Government for a year or two, and provided wheat and cotton prices do not fall heavily, it should be possible for the country to achieve a large measure of economic and financial stability. Syria is essentially an agricultural country and it is generally accepted that her well-being is largely dependent on bringing under the plough to an increasing extent the undeveloped areas of the north. Progress in this direction has been apparent in recent years by the increase in the production of

cereals and cotton, and the satisfactory outcome of this year's harvest will undoubtedly stimulate interest amongst farmers in pursuing this policy. The annual production of raw cotton, which was formerly no more than about 8,000 tons, rose in 1949 to 22,000 tons and provided an exportable surplus of 7,000 tons. Encouraged by the good financial return from this crop, a much larger area of cotton was placed under cultivation, and this year's harvest—according to an official statement by the Ministry of Agriculture—should provide an exportable surplus of 25,000 tons valued in terms of sterling at about £3 million. Last year's cotton exports brought in the equivalent of about £500,000.

10. As regards the benefits derived since the break with the Lebanon last March, customs receipts alone are stated by the Director-General of Customs to be already higher than the annual amount which Syria formerly received as her share from the Common Customs Union, which is to some extent accounted for by the stricter control now maintained over transit traffic and the consequent diminution in smuggling. Other measures taken by the Government in making it necessary for foreign currency derived from exports to be brought into the country has greatly enhanced her foreign exchange position, and during the past two months the Syrian pound in relation to other foreign currencies has much improved.

11. I am sending copies of this despatch to His Majesty's Representatives at Cairo and Beirut and to the Head of the British Middle East Office.

I have, &c.

W. H. MONTAGU-POLLOCK.

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No. 10

CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE SECRETARY OF STATE AND THE
LEBANESE FOREIGN MINISTER

Defence of the Middle East

Mr. Bevin to Mr. Bailey (Beirut)

(No. 212. Secret)
Sir,

Foreign Office,
9th November, 1950.

I asked the Lebanese Foreign Minister to call on me this morning before his return to the Lebanon.

2. I informed his Excellency that I wished to speak privately and confidentially to him on the subject of the Defence of the Middle East. He would know that the situation

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as between ourselves and Egypt on this question was unsatisfactory at present, and it might be necessary to consider a new approach, perhaps on the basis of a collective defensive arrangement which might include, besides the United Kingdom and Egypt, Turkey, the United States, and conceivably other North Atlantic Treaty Powers. Before such an approach was

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decided upon, however, I wished if possible to ensure that it would not create any difficulties with the Arab States owing to their not having previously been advised of it. We seemed gradually to be overcoming the difficulties which had arisen in the past with these States, and I did not wish to risk raising new ones.

3. As regards the Lebanon, we had recognised the position of France. I wished to know, before discussing the general question with M. Schuman, whether there had been any discussions on defence matters between the Lebanon and France.

4. M. Tacla replied that there had been no such discussions. In this connexion, he wished to emphasise that, should any collective arrangements for Middle East defence be envisaged, it would be important from his Government's point of view to ensure that these did not involve the re-establishment of any French military forces in the Lebanon or Syria. It might be possible to arrive at some arrangement involving collaboration in defence between his country and the Western Powers; the Lebanon had neither the forces nor the industrial capacity to make a significant contribution, but she possessed ports, communications, and aerodromes which might well prove of service. In the light of past history, however, it would be politically impracticable to conclude any arrangement which might create the suspicion that France would therefore be placed in a position to re-assert her past domination over the Levant States.

5. M. Tacla went on to say that in his view it would be undesirable to attempt to associate Turkey in any defence arrange-

ment involving the Arab States (other than Egypt), in view of the dormant suspicion of Turkey which still existed in those States which had been detached from her at the end of the first world war. Similarly it would be impossible to contemplate associating Israel in any such arrangements.

6. For these reasons M. Tacla considered that any facilities which the Western Powers might require from the Arab States could, in his opinion, best be obtained by individual approaches to these States through our representatives.

7. Finally, M. Tacla, after stressing that the views which he had expressed were personal ones, asked whether he could be given any indication of when it was likely that any approach to his Government on defence matters could be expected. I informed him that the ideas I had been expressing were tentative and had still to be discussed with other interested Powers. My impression was that 1951 was likely to be a critical year, during which it might be possible to achieve peace or it might be necessary to push ahead with defence arrangements. My object in eliciting his views at this stage was to ensure, if possible, that no step was taken in the Middle East without a due appreciation of the political factors involved.

8. I am sending copies of this despatch to His Majesty's Representatives at Washington, Paris, United Kingdom Delegation, (New York), Damascus, Bagdad, Tel Aviv, Jeddah, Amman, Ankara, B.M.E.O., and Cairo.

I am, &c.
ERNEST BEVIN.

APPENDIX

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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No. 11

LEBANON: HEADS OF FOREIGN MISSIONS

Sir Houstoun-Boswall to Mr. Bevin (Received 12th August)

(No. 84. Confidential) *Beirut,*
Sir, *8th August, 1950.*

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith a report on the Heads of Foreign Missions at Beirut.

I am sending a copy of this despatch to His Majesty's Minister at Damascus.

I have, &c.

W. E. HOUSTOUN-BOSWALL.

Enclosure in No. 11

Heads of Foreign Missions in the Lebanon, 1950

(Passages marked with an asterisk are reproduced from previous reports.)

Argentina

M. Carlos R. Pineyro, Minister. (12th December, 1949.)

Quite an agreeable and friendly seeming man, though I do not see a great deal of him. He was Consul-General here in 1941 and has a German wife who was at that time not unnaturally suspect. She is a pleasant lady and dresses well, and they appear to be quite a nice and harmless couple.

Belgium

Count Geoffrey d'Aspremont-Lynden, Minister. (22nd December, 1946.)

Also accredited to Syria.
A nice man with a vague, pleasant enough and very social wife. He has a certain amount to do here as his country has several big commercial interests. They are very energetic and, although middle-aged, tend to be on the "bright young" side. However, they are agreeable and pleasant when one meets them.

Brazil

M. Carlos Martins Thompson-Flores, Minister. (10th August, 1948.)

Also accredited to Syria.
*A very agreeable colleague of the forthcoming type but, as he has no real work to do here, what issues from him is mostly of a pleasant social nature. His wife is a handsome, affable lady who speaks French. The Minister also speaks a little English. They live next door to us and are good neighbours. (Written in 1949.)

Chile

M. Luis N. Feliu, Minister. (22nd February, 1949.)

*A rather dreary-looking but quite friendly soul who occasionally laughs. He lives with his somewhat dull and dowdy wife in a hotel as he cannot be bothered to keep house. I gathered from him that Madame Feliu was not at her best handling servants. He tells me he has nothing to do, but he does it agreeably. (Written in 1949.)

Colombia

Dr. Rodolfo Garcia Garcia, Minister. (14th June, 1949.)

He is quite an agreeable little man, though of course without any real work to occupy him; he has a hypochondriacal wife. He is affable on such occasions as one meets them, which is not often.

Czechoslovakia

M. Karel Stanek, Chargé d'Affaires *a.i.* (10th November, 1945.)

Also accredited to Syria.

*A man of paternal and benign appearance, though he is said to be an ardent exponent of communism and works in the closest touch with the Russians, from whom he doubtless gets his orders. He knows the country and conditions very well, having been here nearly four years. He has a wife, but I do not recall meeting her. (Written in 1949.)

Egypt

Mohamed Wajih Rustom Bey, Minister. (25th January, 1949.)

*An agreeable man of rubicund appearance and a genial manner. To talk to he appears to be sensible and moderate and is at all times very friendly indeed. I am not quite sure, however, whether he may not be, at least to a mild extent, something of a *faux bonhomme*, though I like what I have seen of him. He has served in London, and was, I think, at one time Secretary-General for Foreign Affairs. His second wife, whom he married fairly recently, is a well-turned-out, attractive woman, a good deal younger than her husband and, I should imagine, comfortably endowed. They do things well. (Written in 1949.)

France

Count Armand du Chayla, Minister. (7th July, 1946.)

*A bachelor of about 53 who, being almost a physical culture maniac, does not look his age. He is well turned out, does things well, entertains on a lavish scale and probably has money of his own. He has the reputation of having a good war record in the French Resistance movement. He is superficially an agreeable and friendly colleague but he is not co-operative and on the rare occasions when I have tried politics with him has shown a tendency to brush the whole thing aside as though it did not matter. He is politically fanatical on the side of the Christian element in the Lebanon and makes a great show of visiting the Maronite hierarchy, ostentatiously attending masses, and so on. He does not conceal his contempt for the Moslems. He has a good position in rich Lebanese society. (Written in 1949.)

Greece

M. Nicholas Hadji Vassiliou, Chargé d'Affaires *a.i.* (20th August, 1947.)

Also accredited to Syria, Iraq and Jordan.

*An affable and rather self-important busybody, who is always very obviously on the look out for

"news"; he is very keen to collaborate closely with us in all fields. He is an agreeable but rather tiring man, who speaks French and English fluently. His wife is nice, too. (Written in 1948.) He will shortly be recalled to Athens at his own request for employment in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Holy See

Mgr. Alcide Marina, Nuncio. (24th June, 1947.)
 *An experienced Vatican diplomatist. He has been Papal Representative at Tehran and Ankara, whence he came here direct. He is, I believe, about 64 years of age and well preserved. He makes an excellent impression and, judging by what he said when we met for the first time, I should imagine that he will exert a very wholesome influence among the Christians here, some of whom are inclined to look back with longing to the days when they enjoyed foreign protection. (Written in 1947.) I have found him very co-operative and helpful. He makes a good and dignified Doyen. (Written in 1948.)

Iraq

M. Ibrahim Khodeiri, Minister. (21st March, 1950.)

He was for many years a civil servant before taking to diplomacy. A very friendly and co-operative colleague. He has a quiet dignity and is gradually building up quite a nice position for himself. He speaks English fluently and his wife less so. They are a nice couple.

Italy

M. Vittorio Castellani Pastoris, Minister. (18th February, 1950.)

Rather a colourless but kindly and affable personality with a wife to match. He knows this part of the world, having in the past been Consul at Damascus. He is a pleasant and courteous colleague.

Jordan

M. Barhan Bey Chbeilat, Minister. (6th March, 1948.)

A nice, friendly little man who makes a good impression. He is ably seconded by his wife, who is of Yugoslav Moslem origin, her family having settled in the Jordan several generations ago. He is dignified and performs his rather difficult mission with a surprising amount of skill and tact, torn as he is on occasions between rather impetuous instructions from King Abdullah (often indiscreetly communicated by telephone) and the counsels of his own better judgment. Like his predecessor, against whom he used to report privately to the King, he himself now suffers similarly at the hands of a member of his own staff. He and his wife speak English well and are very good colleagues.

Mexico

M. Antonio Mendez Fernandez, Minister. (30th December, 1949.)

A typical South American diplomat, he is polite, affable and the sort of person that one is never sorry to see but to whom one can think of little to say, and who has nothing to talk about himself except the latest party. He has nothing to do and does it well.

Persia

M. Aboul-Ghassem Pourevally, Minister. (17th December, 1949.)

A nice, friendly colleague and a career diplomatist. He has a pleasant and decorative German wife. Whenever one meets them they are gushingly friendly.

Poland ("London Committee")

M. Zigmunt Zawadowski, Minister. (17th August, 1944.)

*Until the enforced dissolution in July 1945 of the Government which he claims to represent, M. Zawadowski enjoyed a good position here, partly because the Lebanese were grateful to Poland for being the first country after Great Britain and France to recognise their independence. Since then his position has become increasingly equivocal. (Written in 1947.) And now, all except some sixty or so infirm or undesirable Polish refugees having been evacuated to England and elsewhere, it is becoming less and less clear why the London Committee should have diplomatic representation in the Lebanon at all. He says that he has enough money to keep him going for another year or so, and I think that such qualities as he may possess are more or less "for sale." Like most of his countrymen he is a born intriguer, but his great asset is that he is rabidly anti-Communist. He is married but his wife and daughter prefer to live in Paris.

Saudi-Arabia

Said Bey el Rashesh, Chargé d'Affaires. (11th December, 1946.)

*A Damascene whom I knew at Bagdad where, as here, he was always friendly and, generally speaking, co-operative, making great play of the relations between his sovereign and His Majesty's Government. He is rather a bore and does not enjoy a very savoury reputation though he is quite civilised externally. He speaks English and French. (Written in 1949.) His wife, who he tells me is beginning to frequent society, is Turkish.

Soviet Union

M. Victor Khangulov, Chargé d'Affaires *a.i.* (5th July, 1946.)

Also accredited to Syria.
 M. Ilya Kaisarovich Tavadze, the Minister designate, has not yet arrived but is expected shortly.

Spain

Don Joaquin del Castillo y Caballero Marquis de Castro-Torres, Minister. (12th May, 1949.)

Also accredited to Syria.
 A nice, affable and cultured man who does not expect to have very much to do here and looks forward to the shooting season in Syria. He is well disposed and was, after the Spanish Civil War, Consul at Newcastle-on-Tyne for some years. He speaks French and rather bad English. His wife is a very charming lady, and they are an asset to our rather dull diplomatic corps. Most of their five children are with them here.

Switzerland

Dr. Franz Kappeler, Chargé d'Affaires. (1st March, 1950.)

Also accredited to Syria.
 A very nice man who has not before served abroad, I believe. He and his wife are always friendly and appear to be settling down to quiet family life.

Turkey

M. Celal Osman Abacioglu, Minister. (3rd May, 1945.)

*A hypochondriacal Turk of the old school. He is rarely seen without a greatcoat even on a hot day and is pompously formal. Is given somewhat to speechifying in the course of private conversation.

He and his rather dim wife are most friendly. (Written in 1947.) He is a good colleague but one of those who are more apt to seek than to impart information. I like him. (Written in 1949.)

United States

Mr. Lowell Pinkerton, Minister. (26th February, 1947.)

*Having served in London, Australia, New Zealand, &c., this is his first post outside the British Empire. He was, I believe, eight years Consul-General at Jerusalem before coming here. He is very friendly and co-operative, and I think utterly reliable. He has a nice wife. (Written in 1947.) He is an admirable colleague and, though not personally in sympathy with the Zionist policy of his Government, has comported himself with great dignity and has had no difficulty in retaining the respect and affection of the Lebanese officials.

Yugoslavia

M. Lazar Lilitch, Chargé d'Affaires *a.i.* (9th April, 1949.)

Also accredited to Syria.
 A nice little man with an apparently nice wife. Both speak a little French. One never meets them except at official parties, when they are friendly and glad to be spoken to.

Ministers accredited to the Lebanon but resident elsewhere

Afghanistan

Gholam Yahia Khan Tarazi. (3rd August, 1948.) Bagdad.

Norway

M. Francis Irgens. (15th November, 1949.) Cairo.

Saudi-Arabia

Sheikh Abdul Aziz Ben Zeid. (16th February, 1945.) Damascus.

Sweden

M. Wider Bagge. (18th June, 1947.) Cairo.

Ethiopia

M. Taffesse Habte-Mikael. (2nd August, 1949.) Cairo.

India

Dr. Assaf Ali Asghar Fayzee. (17th November, 1949.) Cairo.

Netherlands

Count van Rechteren Limburg. (17th November, 1949.) Cairo.

Pakistan

Dr. Barakat Ali Quraichi. (7th March, 1950.) Damascus.